

Is Ben Barka Dead? Paris Wonders

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PARIS, Jan. 27—A shadow of doubt is beginning to fall on Paris: Is Mehdi Ben Barka, the Moroccan opposition leader really dead?

The accepted version has been that Ben Barka was kidnaped by two French policemen on Oct. 29; that they drove him to a suburban villa and handed him over to a group of thugs in the pay of Moroccan Interior Minister Gen. Mohammed Oufkir; that Oufkir arrived next day, and that Ben Barka was then murdered. But there is no corpse.

About the only person here who firmly believes that Ben Barka is alive is Abdelkadir Ben Barka, who says his brother was kidnaped to apply political pressure to the Moroccan situation and who notes that "you can't negotiate with a corpse."

The official charge in the case remains that of kidnaping, not murder. The only evidence that Ben Barka was assassinated is the testimony of Georges Figon, a ringleader in the kidnaping. He cannot be questioned further since he is dead; he either killed himself or was executed to keep him from talking.

Figon told a story of the kidnaping in which he described, as an eyewitness, the torture of Ben Barka by Oufkir in the first villa to which he was taken. He apparently assumed that the Moroccan leader had been killed in a second villa to which he was then moved. But admittedly, Figon was not at the second villa.

One theory is that Ben Barka was taken to Brest, and smuggled aboard a freighter

bound for Morocco, where he may now be imprisoned.

The toughness of Rabat's resistance to French pressure leads some observers to suspect that the Moroccans may suddenly produce Ben Barka and thus deflate the French charges against them.

There are other stories. One is that Ben Barka's head was sent to Morocco in a box. Another is that the Moroccans who came with Oufkir prospected a small wood near the Orly airport looking for a good place to bury the body.

[A tape-recording seized in Figon's home after his death was played in court today and was found to be the scenario of a gangster film Figon was writing, the Associated Press reported. It was hoped that the tape would contain the confession Figon is said to have made of his role in the Ben Barka kidnaping.]